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ABSTRACT

A program at Lincoln High School in Stockton, California paired mainstream English classes with English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes to improve communication and understanding among students. Two mainstream literature classes were paired with two ESL literature classes. The pairs met about once a month during the school year, with half of the mainstream class joining half of the ESL class for group activities. Students were usually assigned to cooperative learning groups to participate in activities designed for sharing personal backgrounds, values, and cultures. Students were surveyed about the differences between the groups and the effects of the class pairing. ESL students responded more positively toward school and asking teachers for help. Mainstream students found interaction with classmates easier. The biggest gaps between the student groups were in the areas of trust, safety, and control over one's life, with the mainstream students feeling more positive in these areas. Both groups found the program worthwhile, and students in all classes commented that the best part of the paired classes was getting to know students with a culturally different background. Some ESL students gained in English skills and confidence as a result. It is recommended that the program be expanded. (MSE)

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PAIRED CLASSES EVALUATION
BASED ON SURVEY RESULTS

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Lincoln High School, Stockton, California

1988-1989 School Year

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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During the 1988-1989 school year, Title VII (7-12) funded a project which "paired" mainstream English and ESL classes. The purpose of the project was to help facilitate better communication and understanding among students.

The mainstream classes were composed of one section of "American Literature" and one section of "Modern Literature", for a total of 55 students. These students were juniors and seniors, and 68% of them recorded their ethnic background as Caucasian. Six of the mainstream students were born in countries other than the United States.

The ESL classes were composed of two sections of "Focus on Literature", for a total of 52 students. Students were primarily juniors and seniors, but also included freshmen and sophomores. All students were born in countries other than the United States, including Cambodia (65%) and Vietnam (28%).

The paired classes met approximately once a month throughout the school year. Classes were divided in half, so that half of a mainstream class joined half of

an ESL class. At the same time, half of the ESL students joined the mainstream classroom. The activities in each paired class were the same.

Students were usually assigned to cooperative learning groups. They shared past experiences and personal items of importance. Students analyzed poems or short stories. They joined together to figure out how to survive in a desert or how to make a machine. All activities were planned to facilitate communication and share personal backgrounds, values, and cultures. Being open to new ideas and "active" listening were particularly encouraged.

The survey consisted of statements that the students "ranked" on a scale of 1 - 5 (Never, Almost Never, Sometimes, Almost Always, and Always).

The survey results are divided into four parts:

- How do attitudes between mainstream and ESL students differ?
- What positive growth took place between the pre and post surveys?
- How did the students feel about the project?
- How can we improve the paired classes program in the future?

HOW DO ATTITUDES BETWEEN MAINSTREAM AND ESL STUDENTS DIFFER?

Comparison of Mainstream and ESL Responses

Post Survey, June 1989

	Questions	Percent of students who responded "Always" or "Almost Always"	
		Mainstream	ESL
1.	I like school.	.44	.68
2.	It's easy for me to talk to classmates.	.77	.56
3.	School is a safe place.	.65	.38
4.	I trust other people.	.49	.14
5.	I make new friends easily.	.67	.48
6.	I am a good listener.	.74	.48
7.	If I need help with school work, I ask my teachers.	.27	.62
8.	If I need help with school work, I ask classmates.	.60	.46
9.	I think I am as smart as other students my age.	.81	.62
10.	If I have a personal problem, I share it with friends.	.56	.36
11.	If I have a personal problem, I keep it to myself.	.27	.46
12.	I have control over making decisions about my life.	.75	.35
13.	I enjoy trying new and different food.	.58	.70
14.	I like to visit homes of people who are culturally different from me.	.30	.44

Compared to mainstream students, ESL students in this sample responded more positively toward school and asking teachers for help. Mainstream students' responses indicated that they talk to classmates more easily and make friends more easily than the ESL students.

The biggest gaps between ESL and mainstream students were in the areas of trust, safety, and control over one's life. According to their responses, mainstream students are more than three times as likely to trust people than ESL students. Mainstream students generally feel safe at school. About one-third of the ESL students responded that they never or almost never feel safe at school (compared to 5% of the mainstream students). Almost half of the ESL students said they keep personal problems to themselves, while only a quarter of the mainstream students said they keep personal problems to themselves. The majority of mainstream students indicated they have control over their lives (75%), while only 35% of the ESL students responded this way.

From the results of this survey, it appears we need to encourage the mainstream students to work more closely with teachers when they need help with school work and to help them feel more positive about school in general. ESL students seem to need help in the areas of

feeling safe at school, trusting people, and sharing personal problems. We should also help ESL students feel they have more control over their lives, although this is a sensitive issue since it may conflict with their families' cultural values.

WHAT POSITIVE GROWTH TOOK PLACE BETWEEN THE PRE AND POST SURVEYS?

Among the mainstream students, positive growth in communication, intercultural interaction, and self-esteem (10% or more increase) is reported below.

Survey Results for Mainstream Students

Questions	Percent of Students who responded "Always" or "Almost Always"	
	Pretest	Postest
1. It's easy for me to talk to adults.	.50	.63
2. I think I am as smart as other students my age.	.71	.81
3. I willingly participate in class discussions.	.43	.56
4. I talk to culturally different students in class.	.31	.44
5. I enjoy trying new and different food.	.39	.58
6. I like the way I look.	.59	.72
7. I have control over making decisions about my life.	.65	.75

Among the ESL students, more dramatic positive growth was measured.

Survey Results for ESL Students

Questions	Percent of students who responded "Always" or "Almost Always"	
	Pretest	Postest
1. I like school.	.55	.68
2. I like to share ideas with other people.	.29	.54
3. It's easy for me to talk to adults.	.45	.56
4. It's easy for me to talk to classmates.	.39	.56
5. If I need help with school work, I ask classmates.	.33	.46
6. I think I am as smart as most students my age.	.52	.62
7. I willingly participate in class discussions.	.39	.50
8. I talk to culturally different students in class.	.35	.50
9. I have control over making decisions about my life.	.25	.35

The ESL students seemed to move in the direction of feeling more comfortable when talking to teachers and classmates, sharing ideas with others, and taking part in class discussions. Talking to culturally different students and generally liking school also increased.

HOW DID THE STUDENTS FEEL ABOUT THE PROJECT?

Students were asked to fill out a short questionnaire to assess the project. Reaction to the paired classes was overwhelmingly positive.

In mainstream classes, 85% of the students responded that the experience was worthwhile and that it should be continued. Only one mainstream student responded in a negative manner. Among ESL students, 89% responded positively and 11% were neutral. No ESL student responded negatively.

In all classes, students commented that the best part of the paired classes was getting to know culturally-different students. Students said they gained new insights about other cultures and value systems. Several students said that they felt more comfortable talking to others who were "different" from them. Some mainstream students reflected, "I realized they are people with feelings just like me." "My attitude toward them has changed."

Several ESL students said they made American friends and improved their ability to communicate in English. Some ESL students said they were "afraid" when the program started, but now feel more confident. One ESL student said, "I wish the paired class program would never end."

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THE PAIRED CLASS PROGRAM IN THE FUTURE?

Based on students' comments, the paired-class program should be expanded. Two mainstream students said it should be required for graduation! Many students recommended that the classes meet more frequently and that the program be introduced into other classes, such as social science. Most students wrote that the activities should be "fun" and not academic. They seemed to like the small group activities best, and indicated that the snacks added greatly to the positive atmosphere of the sessions.

This first attempt at pairing classes was extremely successful. The program helped to bring a variety of students together who would not have otherwise come together. The classes helped to break down stereotypes and increase communication among students with different values and perspectives. The teachers involved - Leona Chester, Ken Class, and Janet Ghio - were excellent role models and facilitators.

Although random interaction between students is risky and may result in negative feelings, the results of this survey indicate that taking time from academic learning to create an atmosphere for positive communication is worthwhile. Student responses

to the paired classes supports the philosophy that, as educators, we need to help students develop interpersonal skills and provide class time to encourage positive interaction. Attitudes between people can change after meaningful interaction.

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